

The Exploits of the One-Eyed Man

BY EDWARD TOWLER.

PROLOGUE.

The Britanic drew alongside the prince's landing-stage at Liverpool, and the one-eyed man stepped briskly along the gangway to the shore. The voyage was ended, and he was glad; but as he whistled softly to himself the thought ran through his mind that possibly others his arrival in England would not be so welcome. His face was lean and dark, and a pair of bushy eyebrows, nearly meeting at the junction of the nose, gave a sinister look to a countenance that did not require the added detail of a missing eye to accentuate its evil aspect. It was a fact that made people shudder involuntarily, and if he had lived in the middle ages he would probably have made an early acquaintance with the stake for being possessed of an evil eye. His thin lips were compressed tightly, although at the corners there lurked what might be fitly described as the ghost of a wintry smile, for he never smiled openly. His dress was a quiet Scotch tweed, gray in color, and he carried a portmanteau in his hand, and a rug over his arm. Such was the personality of the man who was destined to make England ring with his exploits.

He had booked under the name of Jonathan P. Brown, of Jersey City, U.S.A., and had an intermediate ticket from New York to Liverpool. On landing he went straight to the general post office and inquired for letters or telegrams. He was handed a telegram. It was addressed to James P. Smyth, of Pittsburg, and from this it will be gathered that the one-eyed man was particular neither as to his name nor his address. He tore the envelope open and read: "Dear father, come home at once; James very bad. No hope. Given up."

Again the wintry smile played about the thin, hard mouth, and the one eye gleamed with cat-like brilliancy; then he went straight to the Lime street railway station, and night found him at the door of a house off the Euston-road, in London. He hesitated a moment before knocking; indeed, upon second thought, he drew a latekey from his pocket and quietly let himself in. For a moment he stood in the hall, then silently stepped up to the closed door of a room, on the left side of a passage and listened.

"I tell you," said a voice, "I care no more for your one-eyed man than I do for that pot dog on the mantelpiece." A second voice said, "I'm with you there. There's a lot of much fuss made over him. We do the work, he collars the dollars, rot him!"

"I say," said the first, "what's his name—his real name, I mean? He's aliases by the score, but hang me if I know who he is, although I, as it were, work for him."

"Call him anything. Down in Jersey City he's known as Captain Nick. Frisco knows him as the one-eyed boss, and to you and me he's known as No. 1," said the second.

"Say," said the first, "what became of the balance of that haul he made on the Grand Trunk railway last fall? There was a hundred thousand dollars, but only fifty thousand whacked out."

"There you have me," answered the other.

"Well, I've had enough. I shall split, and you and I know enough to get him a life. There's twenty thousand dollars reward for him in the states. That's ten thousand apiece—what do you say?"

"He's a terror to handle. I admit," said the other. "But, hang it! we're not kids. I'm with you. We'll blow the gaff on him tomorrow."

"Where is he now?" asked the first. The door opened, and the one-eyed man stepped in. "He is here," he said, quietly.

The two men, seated one on each side of the fire, sprang to their feet, then dropped back speechless.

The one-eyed man took a chair between them and the door, surveyed them silently for a few minutes, and then said, "I knew you were about to give the show away. James Thornton, but as for you, Richard Grant, well, I confess I have been deceived in you. Do you know what you have incurred? Fool!" he went on, fiercely, his eye blazing with passion. "For to pit your added brains against mine! Did you think I should not tumble to your game? If you are false, there are men in my league true as steel, and though you did not think it, even though I am thousands of miles away, eyes watch on my account, and, by Heaven, my one eye is worth a hundred of your four, you blind rats!"

The One-eyed Man went through their pockets silently and swiftly, taking only papers and letters, so as to leave no clue to their identity. Then, going to the mirror, he took something from a small box in his pocket, and inserted it in his empty eye-socket. When he turned from the glass he was no longer the One-eyed Man. He had now two eyes, and it would have taken a clever detective to know him for the same man. Then he put on a mustache with some spirit gum, and silently left the house with its dreadful secret.

A half hour brought him to another house, on the borders of Notting-hill. This time he knocked, and the door was opened by a man who greeted him cordially.

"I got your wire at Liverpool," remarked the One-eyed Man, after the door had been closed; "and, thanks to your information that James was very bad, I called to see him, and found friend Grant also very bad, so bad that, as you said, there was no hope for him."

"Go on," said the other eagerly. "They would have sold you to the police."

"The One-eyed Man smiled grimly. "Do you remember Sam Hankey?" he said.

"Great Scott! yes," said the other. "Well, James has died. There was no hope, as you said. Things have gone too far, and, fortunately, Grant is dead also."

"Good heavens! that's quick." "The case needed immediate attention, my friend. Now to business. Have you got all the details for the next coup?"

"They're here," replied the other, and as the One-eyed Man leaned over the papers he said: "Now for the first deed that will make the London police aware that a smarter man than they ever met is amongst them!"

I.—THE EAST ANGLIAN BANK ROBBERY.

The scene of the events here related was the east coast of England. In a small, straggling village not more than six miles from a railway center, the occupants of a small room, two in number, were conning a cyclist's road map of the district. They were the One-eyed Man and his lieutenant, who went by the name of "Greaser," among the gang, from some trace of Mexican blood in him; but in the village he was known by the more euphonious name of Rowlands. The One-eyed Man's cognomen was Henry J. Macassar. They had been lodging in Sheringham for four weeks, ostensibly for health and pleasure. With little excursions, fishing on the Broads, and other mild pursuits, such as sketching, they whittled away the daylight hours, whilst night saw them in the sanctity of their bedroom, scanning, by the aid of an oil lamp, the contour of the coast and the roads therefrom.

On the night in question they were completing the details of their plan, and were poring over the map, when the One-eyed Man spoke abruptly. "Here's the spot," he said, pointing with his finger to a dot on the coast.

His lieutenant, leaning over his left shoulder, read "Cley."

"That's it," continued the One-eyed Man; "nice and quiet, and a good road through to Holt and Fakenham, and on to Peterboro'. Good road to double back on Norwich or through to London. Are the tyres all right?"

"Right as the mail," said the other. "Well, tomorrow night the Submarine will lie off Cley, and we'll sail on her the proceeds of our robbery of the East Anglian bank in Norwich easily in an hour, barring accident to the Panhard. I fix the time for beginning operations at 3.30 p. m."

"Greaser! Break daylight!" almost yelled the lieutenant.

The One-eyed Man looked coldly at him. "I'm afraid, Greaser, you have got to learn that my method of proceeding differs somewhat from that of the common or garden individual who prowls round with a dark lantern and a jemmy."

"Oh, I knew you were a clinker at the game, Boss; but whoever cracks a crib then? And a bank at that! Why, the clerks will be there!"

"They will not, for the bank shuts at three, and most of them go almost upon the stroke. But, granted one or two are left, they will be your especial charge, Mr. Greaser."

"I suppose, Boss, you do not mind informing me how you purpose proceeding; I am thick-headed enough to be totally in the dark."

The One-eyed Man smiled through his thin lips almost pityingly at the Greaser, who sat opposite to him.

"You poor fool," he said; "you poor fool! I doubt if I shall ever make a master of you. And yet I had hopes!"—and again he smiled upon him. "Do you think I am going to throw a dynamite bomb on the bank, or what?"

"I tell you I don't know," growled the other sullenly, with red temper showing dully on his cheek—an indication the One-eyed Man noted, for a quarrel with the Greaser on the eve of a big haul was not to be thought of. He hastened to conciliate him.

"Listen, my friend," he said. "I have here a list of the names of the leading directors of the bank, and the first and foremost is that of its chairman, Lord Amberstone. Tomorrow afternoon, about 2 o'clock, you go to the manager and deliver a note, asking him to accompany you to the Maid's Head hotel at 2.30 to meet the chairman upon important business. He is a new manager, and does not know Lord Amberstone personally. I rely upon that for the success of the scheme. You will conduct him to me in my private room, and still in the character of my servant, you will await my orders. The Submarine has instructions to be off Cley at 7 p. m. The skipper—Bresci, the Italian—will land in a patent collapsible boat, and meet us a little to the westward of the Rocket Tower on the beach. He will hide the boat in the scrubby grass that lies alongside and wait for us at the back of the huge sea-wall of stones. We meet him with the stuff in our motor, stow it aboard, and there you are!"

"You forget the coastguard," said the Greaser.

"I do not," said the One-eyed Man, sharply. "I ask you, am I in the habit of forgetting things like that? He does not go to his rounds till nearly 8 o'clock. Haven't we been moth-hunting in that beastly marsh for weeks only to ascertain the time of his rounds? We take the motor down the road to the Rocket Station, and there you are!"

"Well, the plan should answer," said the Greaser in reply. "Anyway, I'm on. Now let's go to bed. By the way, what do you expect to get in the way of booty?"

"Well, I reckon on twenty thousand pounds in hard cash. Is that decent enough, Mr. Greaser?"

The Greaser did not answer, but smiled hugely.

The next afternoon, at the appointed time, a smart servant handed in a note for the manager of the East Anglian bank, and that gentleman, upon seeing the distinguished signature at the foot, viz., "Amberstone," hastened, without demur to accompany the messenger to the Maid's Head hotel, where he was ushered into his "lordship's" presence.

His "lordship" was a perfect type of an old country gentleman; his white mustache, florid face, closely-cropped beard, and dark eyes making a striking picture.

"Ah!" he said pleasantly, "you are Mr.—"

"Curtis, my lord," put in the other. "Curtis, the manager of the bank. Well, Mr. Curtis, you have no doubt heard of the Amberstone pearls—priceless heirlooms?"

The manager bowed.

"It is my intention to give a garden party at my place here in Norfolk, and Lady Amberstone desired me to bring the jewels from London so that she might wear them in the evening. I have done so, and not wishing to run any unnecessary risk, I wish you to place them in your safe until the day of the garden party."

"With pleasure, my lord. I—" "Pardon me, Mr. Curtis, but my fads as to the precautions for the safety of my pearls are great. You know sometimes, try how you will, the fact lacks out that they are here or there, and then there is trouble. Three times, Mr. Curtis, have there been attempts to steal them. You will not wonder, therefore, at my anxiety."

"My lord, it is only natural."

"Now, Mr. Curtis, you close at three, do you not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Is it possible to bring my motor into the private yard at the rear of your premises about 3.15, and for you to take me to your strong room, that I may myself see them placed in the safe? The jewels cases are enclosed in two strong dispatch boxes. My servant will carry them."

"It is a trifle irregular, my lord, but—"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Curtis! The board will certainly not censure you for obliging its chairman."

"I am in your hands, my lord," said the manager, obsequiously, not daring for the moment to run counter to the wishes of his "head."

"Well, Mr. Curtis, you may return and prepare, if you will, the receipt for two jewel cases, and I will be there shortly. By the way, I do not want a lot of obtrusive clerks near; you know my anxiety for the safety of the jewels, Mr. Curtis."

"They will be gone, my lord. It is the quiet season, and we are not busy. The bank will be practically shut, except, of course, for the porter. He will be sweeping up, so that you will not be subject to any notice, nor can they talk outside about your visit, my lord."

"That is my point exactly, Mr. Curtis. It is through the idle chatter of clerks that things one wishes kept secret become public property."

"You need have no fear, my lord."

"Thank you, Mr. Curtis," and he bowed the manager out.

Promptly at the time appointed a smart motor containing "my lord" and his confidential servant drove into the private yard belonging to the bank. His lordship was magnificently attired in a fur coat—for it was November—and looked the aristocrat from the crown of his fashionable motor cap to the soles of his American boots. His lieutenant, the Greaser, rang the bell, but his arrival had been noted, for before his hand was away from the button the obsequious manager was smiling at the door.

"This way, my lord," he said, "this way," and the bogus Lord Amberstone stepped in, followed by the lieutenant carrying the two cases.

Arrived at the strong room the manager swung open the massive door. At the same moment the Greaser dropped the boxes and seized the unsuspecting manager from behind. The One-eyed Man promptly clapped a chloroform sponge against his mouth and nose.

There was a convulsive struggle, and the Greaser had a grip of iron, and held the manager like a vice for a moment or two, when his struggles ceased.

"Let go," said the One-eyed Man, and the inanimate form of the manager was laid inside the room with another pad over his mouth for safety. "Quick, now Greaser! Slip two or three boxes in the cases." The sham jewel boxes were opened and the Greaser transferred two of the bank cash boxes, filled with coin of the realm, into one, while the One-eyed Man rapidly transferred a couple more to the other. Then, staggering under the weight, the Greaser started for daylight and the car, while the One-eyed Man kept watch and ward. The Greaser had reached the passage leading to the outside door when the porter came in sight.

"Is your—" were the only words the latter spoke, for the Greaser, like his master, did not stop at trifles, neither did he leave anything to chance. The cash was dropped upon the floor, and silently that diabolical air pistol did its work. With a groan, the wretched man sank upon the floor. The Greaser callously pushed the body on one side, and, picking up the box, continued his interrupted course, depositing his cash in the secret chamber of the car, and returned.

"Anything to report?" said the One-eyed Man.

"Met the porter, Boss."

"Dropped him as per instructions. 'Good! Take these now, and I will bring two more. Thirty thousand in cash, not bad!'"

The Greaser did as he was bid, and then the One-eyed Man shut the doors the strong room vaults, and the locks snapped with a vicious click. The Greaser stepped to the door.

"Boss," he said—"Boss!"

"Good heavens! Boss, there's that poor beggar inside. When he comes round, he'll tell the police on you. The One-eyed Man's voice was metallic in its hardness.

"Greaser," he said, "be pleased to allow me a free hand. My plans, my deals, my work are the product of my brain, and I allow no man to question me. Now silence!"

"But, Boss—"

"Shut up!" hissed the One-eyed Man. "Isn't thirty thousand good enough for you? And you've got the porter on your own shoulders."

The Greaser said no more. Without the slightest obstruction, and unquestioned by a soul, they started the motor car out of the back yard and turned into the main street of the city, then, making for the Aylsham road, disappeared in the fog of the dull November

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THESE HARD TIMES.

Teddy—Please, what does "heirloom" mean, papa?
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Teddy—Um, first time I knew a pair of trousers was called an "heirloom."

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